DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 432 018 CS 216 803

TITLE	NCTE Position on Class Size and Teacher Workload, K-College.
INSTITUTION	National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, IL.
PUB DATE	1998-00-00
NOTE	10p.
AVAILABLE FROM	NCTE Order Department, 1111 West Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096 (single copies free; $7 per 100).
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Class Size; Elementary Secondary Education; *English Instruction; *Faculty Workload; Higher Education; Instructional Effectiveness; *Language Arts; Literacy; Position Papers; *Teacher Student Ratio; *Teaching Conditions
IDENTIFIERS	*National Council of Teachers of English

ABSTRACT

Based on the premise that the challenges of incorporating the necessarily high standards to be literate in today's world require future citizens and the educational community to reconsider the number of students assigned to teachers of English language arts, this National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) position paper outlines what students need to succeed, i.e., what all students have a right to and what kind of teachers they have a right to. The paper pinpoints relevant facts and challenges, and provides goals and strategies to reduce teacher workload and increase the quality of literacy education at all levels, advocating a 3-pronged approach: reduce the class size and workload; hire qualified professional teachers; and provide strong professional development. Separate statements are presented on class size and teacher workload for each educational level, and a 5-year plan is recommended for the secondary level. Contains a 20-item selected bibliography. (NKA)

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1998

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NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH
A PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION OF EDUCATORS IN
ENGLISH STUDIES, LITERACY, AND LANGUAGES

NCTE POSITION ON CLASS SIZE AND TEACHER WORKLOAD, K–COLLEGE

MORE THAN A NUMBER: WHY CLASS SIZE MATTERS

The *Standards for the English Language Arts* describe and clarify what students should learn in English Studies and Language Arts—reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and visually representing—to be literate in today's world. This expanded definition of literacy occurs at a time when classrooms are more culturally diverse than ever, when technology and cyberspace bid for schools' attention and dollars, and when employers are calling for more and more highly skilled workers. The challenges of incorporating these necessarily high standards for the future require citizens and the educational community to reconsider the number of students assigned to teachers of English language arts.

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WHAT OUR STUDENTS NEED TO SUCCEED

NCTE believes that all students have the right to:

- ample opportunities to engage in writing activities;
- frequent opportunities for meaningful oral interaction in the classroom;
- frequent, timely, substantive feedback and assessment of their written and oral work;
- multiple authentic assessments;
- effective interaction with peers regarding both oral and written work;
- frequent experiences with various print and non-print technologies;
- ample time for developing critical and reflective thinking;
- a fair share of the teacher's time.

NCTE also believes that students have a right to teachers who:

- develop individual instructional relationships with their students;
- provide frequent, substantive feedback to students' work;
- devise creative curricula which honor individual learning styles;
- guide students in their critical evaluation and use of various technologies, print, and non-print media;
- engage regularly in professional development;
- communicate regularly with students and parents.

Student Rights and Needs

No football coach in his right mind would try to teach 150 players one hour per day and hope to win the game on Friday night. No, the team is limited to 40 or 50 highly motivated players, and the coach has three or four assistants to work on the many skills needed to play the game. The 'student-teacher' ratio is maybe 15:1. But the English teacher—all alone—has 150 'players' of the game of composition (not to mention literature, language, and the teaching of other matters dropped into the English curriculum by unthinking enthusiasts).

—John C. Maxwell

All students have the right to engage in a variety of literacy activities, to have meaningful interaction with peers and teachers, and to receive frequent and timely feedback. Students also have a right to teachers who develop creative curricula. Students need teachers who have the time and skills necessary to honor individual learning styles and accommodate individual student's instructional needs; who guide students in their critical evaluation and use of various technologies; who engage regularly in professional development; and who communicate regularly with students and parents. These student rights must be the foremost consideration when making decisions concerning class size and teacher workload (see *Breaking Ranks*).

Facts

- Reduced class size provides students with many benefits: greater opportunities for participation, greater individual attention, and improved instruction. Conflicting interpretations and the implications for policy decisions at the local, state, and national levels make research on class size and teacher workload controversial. Yet, a current analysis of long-term studies and recent grassroots research reveals that class size does indeed have a major impact on student achievement, behavior, and attention (see Bracey, "Research").

- Student achievement increases significantly in classes of fewer than 20. Smaller classes, complemented by diverse teaching methods, create better student performance, more positive attitudes, and fewer discipline problems. Students and parents have the right to expect classrooms with these characteristics. (See *Class Size Reduction in Freshman English Classes.)*

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Challenges

Teaching workload includes, but is often not limited to, the amount of time spent working, the number of classes taught, and the number of students in each class. Additionally, English teachers spend only about three-quarters of their average work week at school (see Dusel). This average does not reflect the amount of time necessary to adequately address the needs of students. Teachers of English language arts consistently find themselves working outside of school, thus lengthening their work week. This means that teachers of English, on average, work longer hours than their colleagues in other disciplines. A teacher with 125 students who spends only 20 minutes per paper must have at least 2,500 minutes, or a total of nearly 42 hours, to respond to all the students' papers. Therefore, responding to one paper per week for each of their 125 students requires English teachers to work over 80 hours a week. This response and evaluation time must also be balanced with time for in-class instruction, planning and preparation, administrative paperwork and functions, as well as school supervisory and advisory responsibilities. No other nation requires teachers to work a greater number of hours a day and year than the United States. Compared to their counterparts in other industrialized nations, U.S. teachers lack adequate time for class preparation and collaborative work with their colleagues.

Goals and Strategies

To reduce teacher workload and increase the quality of literacy education at the elementary, secondary, and college levels, the NCTE recommends a three-pronged approach: reduce the class size and workload; hire qualified professional teachers; and provide strong professional development. Such an approach will transform English language arts.

Yet, no simple solutions to the complex challenges of increased literacy demands for our students exist. Funding limitations, school space, the available pool of qualified teachers, and increased attention to technology force community and school leaders to make difficult decisions about changes in class size and workload. To address these concerns, the NCTE recommends the following planning strategies:

- Form a planning team of teaching faculty, principals or deans, central office or college administrators, a School Board or governing board member.
- Develop a short- and long-range plan of action, including goals, timeline, rationale, impact on personnel and budget.
- Determine such needed resources as personnel, classroom space, building space, along with the budgetary implications.
- Develop a staff development plan for experienced and new teachers.
- Encourage school-based decisions on such issues as space, teachers, and budget.

Whatever the strategies employed, reducing class size and teacher workload significantly increases the quality of literacy education in our schools.

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The first curriculum priority is language. Our use of complex symbols separates human beings from all other forms of life. Language provides the connecting tissue that binds society together, allowing us to express feelings and ideas, and powerfully influence the attitudes of others. It is the most essential tool for learning. Language . . . is the means by which all other subjects are pursued.

—Ernest L. Boyer

STATEMENT ON CLASS SIZE AND TEACHER WORKLOAD—ELEMENTARY

Revised by the NCTE Elementary Section, 1996

1. The elementary classroom teacher should not be responsible for more than 25 pupils per class, and in grades K–1 no more than 20 pupils per class.

2. One class period or a minimum of 30 minutes should be provided within each school day for each elementary school teacher's planning time.

3. A half day a month should be set aside for each elementary school teacher for long-range planning.

4. Participation in continuous professional development programs should be considered a part of teachers' workloads and should involve a minimum of three days released time.

5. Participation in professional meetings and activities at local, state, and national levels should be encouraged and financially supported.

6. The use of additional human resources in the classroom should not justify increased pupil–teacher ratio.

7. A library media center with proper staff and adequate, varied resources should be provided in every elementary school. It is recommended that each media center have a minimum of 25 books per student and that individual classrooms contain adequate resource materials and book collections.

8. Clerical services should be available to teachers on an assigned basis to attend to non-instructional tasks such as the collection of money for special events, attendance records, fund raising, and recess and lunch duty. A teacher's primary responsibility should be instruction.

9. Computers, modems, and a phone line should be available in each classroom.

ELEMENTARY

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High schools exist to develop students' powers of thought, taste, and judgment . . . to help them with these uses of their minds. Such undertakings cannot be factory-wrought, for young people grow in idiosyncratic, variable ways, often unpredictably.

—Theodore R. Sizer

STATEMENT ON CLASS SIZE AND TEACHER WORKLOAD—SECONDARY

Prepared by the NCTE Secondary Section, 1990

The Secondary Section of the National Council of Teachers of English recommends that schools, districts, and states adopt plans and implement activities resulting in class sizes of not more than 20 and a workload of not more than 80 for English language arts teachers by the year 2000.

Effective learning demands opportunities for students to become actively involved in their education, and demands many roles for their teachers: teacher as facilitator, as enabler, as empowerer—not only as lecturer and transmitter of knowledge. These opportunities and roles cannot be achieved when teachers are faced with large classes and heavy workloads.

- A teacher who faces 25 students in a class period of 50 minutes has no more than 2 minutes, at best, per pupil for one-to-one interaction during any period.
- The greater the number of students in class, the fewer the opportunities for students to participate orally.
- The larger the number of students in a class, the greater the amount of time devoted to classroom management rather than instruction.
- The larger the class size, the less likely teachers are to develop lessons encouraging higher-level thinking.
- Teachers of larger classes are more likely to spend less time with each student's paper, and to concentrate on mechanics rather than on style and content.

Policy makers must realize that when a teacher spends 20 minutes reading, analyzing, and responding to each paper for a class of 25 students, the teacher must have 500 minutes for those processes alone. A teacher with 125 students who spends only 20 minutes per paper must have at least 2,500 minutes, or a total of nearly 42 hours, to respond to each assignment. Therefore, responding to one paper per week for each of their 125 students requires English teachers to work over 80 hours a week.

Simply reducing class size alone does not necessarily result in improved achievement when instructional methods do not change. Therefore, attention to staff development while addressing class-size reduction goals will assure maximum benefits for students.

Researchers have identified the following encouraging results from reducing class size and improving instructional methods:

- Smaller classes result in increased teacher–student contact.
- Students in smaller classes show more appreciation for one another and more desire to participate in classroom activities.
- In smaller classes, more learning activities take place.
- Smaller classes foster greater interaction among students, helping them understand one another and increasing their desire to assist one another.
- Smaller classes allow for potential disciplinary problems to be identified and resolved more quickly.
- Smaller classes result in higher teacher morale and reduced stress.
- Fewer retentions, fewer referrals to special education, and fewer dropouts are the ultimate rewards of class-size reduction.

The Secondary Section recommends the following five-year plan:

1. Establish a goal to reduce each English language arts class to not more than 20 students and to limit each language arts teacher's workload to not more than 80 students. Districts may demonstrate progress toward this goal in a variety of ways.
2. Write a plan for ongoing staff development to assist teachers as they modify instructional techniques to take advantage of reduced class size. These efforts may include such experiences as conference attendance, inservice courses, college courses, teacher support groups, and writing projects.
3. Collect evidence of support for teacher examination, development, and implementation of effective classroom practices that increase the frequency and quality of teacher–student interactions intended to improve students' language competency.
4. Develop a timeline with annual goals and report on annual accomplishments.
5. Seek a statement of support for the plan from the local board of education and the administrators and teachers involved.

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To teach content in a way that will make subject matter appropriated by students implies the creation and exercise of serious intellectual discipline... To believe that placing students in a learning milieu automatically creates a situation for critical knowing without this kind of discipline is a vain hope. Just as it is impossible to teach someone how to learn without teaching some content, it is also impossible to teach intellectual discipline except through a practice of knowing that enables learners to become active and critical subjects, constantly increasing their critical abilities.

—Paulo Freire

STATEMENT ON CLASS SIZE AND TEACHER WORKLOAD— COLLEGE

Prepared by the NCTE College Section, 1987

In an era of increasing public concern over the writing and reading ability of college students, it is especially important that the workload of English faculty members be reasonable enough to guarantee that every student receive the time and attention needed for genuine improvement. Faculty members must be given adequate time to fulfill their responsibility to their students, their departments, their institutions, their profession, the larger community, and to themselves. Without that time, they cannot teach effectively. Unless English teachers are given reasonable loads, students cannot make the progress the public demands.

Economic pressures and budgetary restrictions may tempt administrations to increase teaching loads. With this conflict in mind, the College Section of the National Council of Teachers of English endorses the following standards:

1. *English faculty members should never be assigned more than 12 hours a week of classroom teaching.* In fact, the teaching load should be less, to provide adequate time for reading and responding to students' writing; for holding individual conferences; for preparing to teach classes; and for research and professional growth.

2. *No more than 20 students should be permitted in any writing class.* Ideally, classes should be limited to 15. Students cannot learn to write without writing. In sections larger than 20, teachers cannot possibly give student writing the immediate and individual response necessary for growth and improvement.

3. *Remedial or developmental sections should be limited to a maximum of 15 students.* It is essential to provide these students extra teaching if they are to acquire the reading and writing skills they need in college.

4. *No English faculty member should teach more than 60 writing students a term; if the students are developmental, the maximum should be 45.*

5. *No more than 25 students should be permitted in discussion courses in literature or language.* Classes larger than 25 do not give students and teachers the opportunity to engage literary texts through questions, discussion, and writing. If lecture classes must be offered, teachers should be given adjusted time or assistance to hold conferences and respond to students' writing.

6. *Any faculty members assigned to reading or writing laboratories or to skills centers should have that assignment counted as part of the teaching load.* Identifying and addressing the individual needs of students is a demanding form of teaching.

7. *No full-time faculty member's load should be composed exclusively of sections of a single course.* (An exception might occur when a specific teacher, for professional reasons such as research or intensive experimentation, specifically requests such an assignment.) Even in colleges where the English program consists mainly of composition, course assignments should be varied. Repeating identical material for the third or fourth time the same day or semester after semester is unlikely to be either creative or responsive.

8. *No English faculty member should be required to prepare more than three different courses during a single term.* Even if the faculty member has taught the same course in previous years, the material must be reexamined in the context of current scholarship, and the presentation adapted to the needs of each class.

9. *The time and responsibility required for administrative, professional, scholarly, and institutional activities should be considered in determining teaching loads and schedules for English faculty members.* These responsibilities cover a broad range, such as directing independent study, theses, and dissertations; advising students on academic programs; supervising student publications; developing new courses and materials; serving on college or departmental committees; publishing scholarly and creative work; refereeing and editing professional manuscripts and journals; or holding office in professional organizations.

COLLEGE

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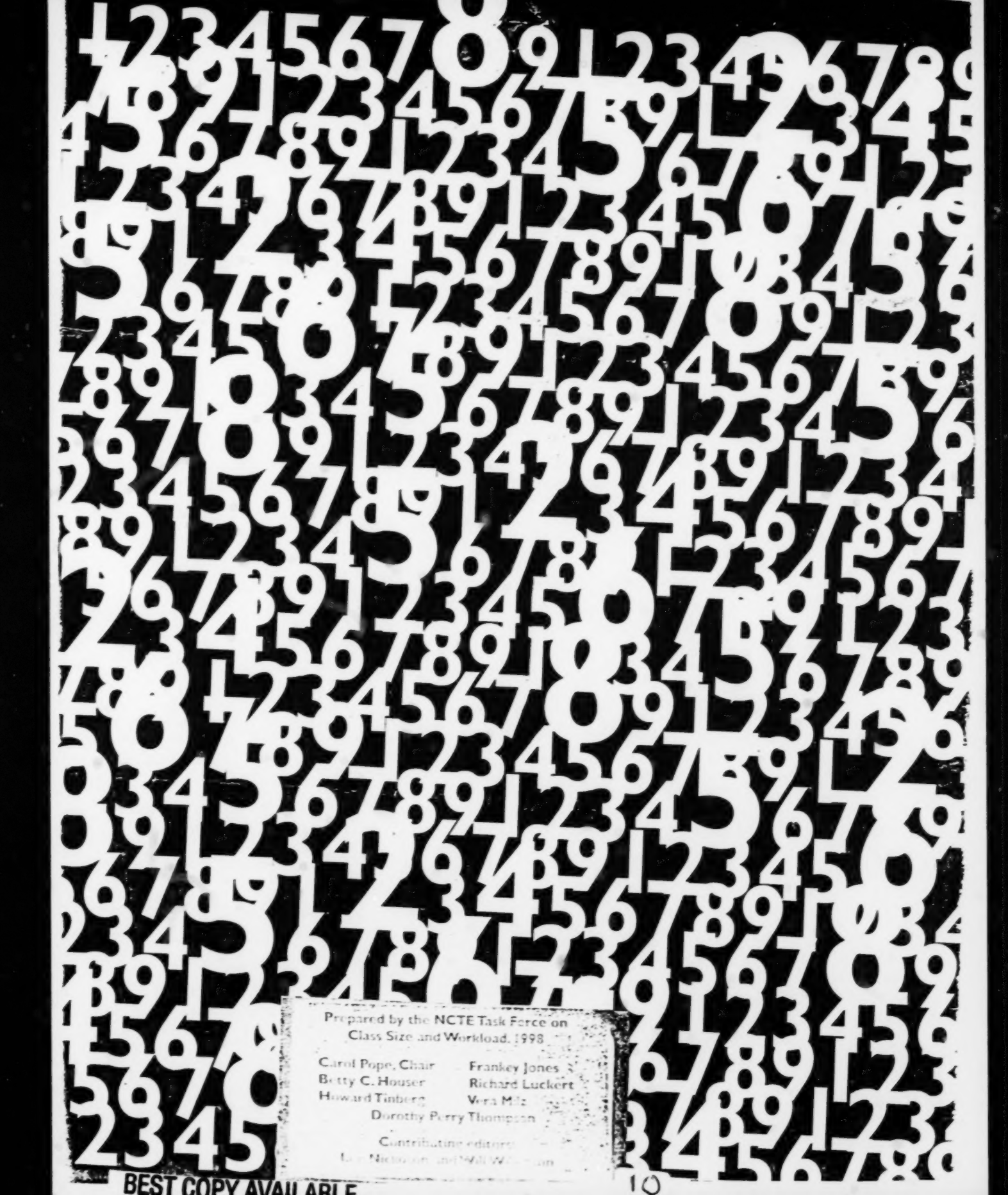

Prepared by the NCTE Task Force on
Class Size and Workload, 1998

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